



Representation of Women in Armed Forces

For Prelims: Army Aviation Corps, Short-Service Commission

For Mains: Women Representation in Military, Background and Significance, Gender, Issues related to Women

Why in News?

Recently, **Captain Abhilasha Barak, created history by becoming the first woman officer to join the [Army Aviation Corps](#) as a **Combat Aviator (pilot)**.**

- At present women are only given the **responsibility of traffic control and ground duty in the Aviation Department** but now Abhilasha Barak will take **over the responsibility of the pilot**.
 - Captain Barak has been assigned to the second flight of the 2072 Army Aviation Squadron that operates the **[Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopter \(ALH\)](#)**.
- While women officers in the Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy have been flying helicopters for long, the Indian Army paved the way for women pilots in 2021 by starting the 'Army Aviation course'.

What is the Army Aviation Corps?

- Army Aviation Corps is the **component of the Indian Army which was established on 1st November, 1986**.
 - The Army Aviation Corps is headed by a **director-general at the Army headquarters in New Delhi**.
- It was immediately **inducted into 'Operation Pawan'** which was a crucial test for the newly formed corps.
- The Army Aviation Corps of the Indian Army **primarily carries out the evacuation of the injured troops during operations or health emergencies** in the high-altitude areas.
- The choppers of the Aviation Corps are also **used for observation, reconnaissance, casualty evacuation, combat research and rescue**, and essential load drops.

What is the State of Women's Representation in the Military?

- **Background:**
 - The Army, Air Force and Navy **began inducting women as short-service commission (SSC) officers in 1992**.
 - This was the first time when women were allowed to join the military outside the medical stream.
 - One of the turning points for women in the military came in 2015 when Indian Air Force (IAF) decided to induct them into the fighter stream.
 - In 2020, the **[Supreme Court \(SC\)](#)** ordered the central government to grant **[permanent commission \(PC\)](#)** to women officers in the Army's non-combat support units on par with their male counterparts.

- The SC had rejected the government's stand of women officers' physiological limitations as **being based on "sex stereotypes" and "gender discrimination against women"**.
- Women officers have been granted PC in the Indian Army in all the ten branches where women are inducted for SSC.
- Women are now eligible to occupy all the command appointments, at par with male officers, which would open avenues for further promotions to higher ranks for them.
- **In early 2021**, the **Indian Navy deployed four women officers on warships** after a gap of almost 25 years.
 - India's only aircraft carrier **INS Vikramaditya** and fleet tanker **INS Shakti** are **the warships** that have been assigned their first women crews since the late 1990s.
- **In May 2021**, the Army inducted the **first batch of women into the Corps of Military Police**, the first time that women joined the military in the non-officer cadre.
 - However, Women are still not allowed in combat arms like Infantry and Armored Corps.
- **Increment in Numbers:**
 - It has increased almost three-fold over the last six years, with more avenues being opened to them at a steady pace.
 - There are 9,118 women currently serving the army, navy and air force.
 - According to 2019 figures, women comprise only 3.8% of the world's second-largest army - compared to 13% of the air force and 6% of the navy.
- **Significance:**
 - **Gender is not a Hindrance:** As long as an applicant is qualified for a position, one's gender is arbitrary. In modern high technology battlefield technical expertise and decision-making skills are increasingly more valuable than simple brute strength.
 - **Military Readiness:** Allowing a mixed gender force keeps the military strong. The armed forces are severely troubled by falling retention and recruitment rates. This can be addressed by allowing women in the combat role.
 - **Effectiveness:** The blanket restriction for women limits the ability of commanders in theater to pick the most capable person for the job.
 - **Tradition:** Training will be required to facilitate the integration of women into combat units. Cultures change over time and the masculine subculture can evolve too.
 - **Global Scenario:** When women officially became eligible for combat positions in the American military in 2013, it was widely hailed as another step towards the equality of sexes. In 2018, the UK military lifted a ban on women serving in close combat ground roles, clearing the way for them to serve in elite special forces.

Way Forward

- Women were **being kept out of command posts on the reasoning that the largely rank and file will have problems** with women as commanding officers. Thus, changes have to take place in the culture, norms, and values of not only the rank and file of the Army but also that of society at large. The responsibility to usher these changes lies with the senior military and political leadership.
- The United States, Israel, North Korea, France, Germany, Netherlands, Australia and Canada are among the **global militaries that employ women in front-line combat positions**.
- It is the **right of every woman to pursue a career of her choice** and reach the top since Equality is a constitutional guarantee.

Source: TH